

AN OCCURRENCE OF THE VARIEGATED FAIRY-WREN, *MALURUS LAMBERTI*, AT MAYLANDS, PERTH W.A.

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The Variegated Fairy-wren, *Malurus lamberti*, is a casual visitor to the banks of the Swan River (Storr and Johnstone 1988) but at Maylands its habitat and behaviour are so uncharacteristic of the species that further details are warranted.

For instance it is a fairly quiet species in W.A. with only a muted reeling call, and when I heard very loud and most spirited reeling calls at Maylands on 4 June 1983, I guessed that the caller would be a male Splendid Fairy-wren, *Malurus splendens*, for it has the loudest and most spirited calls of our local fairy-wrens, and this species sometimes wanders into the suburbs. But upon nearing the dense and tangled vegetation bordering a perennial, freshwater stream I saw the upper-parts of two males and they were of the red-winged group. I could not see their lower backs, the birds were in dense shade and the late-afternoon sun was very poor. But I now guessed that because of the habitat the birds would be Red-winged Fairy-wrens, *Malurus elegans*, such habitat being characteristic of that species, and uncharacteristic of the Variegated Fairy-wren. Further, there were many female-plumaged birds accompanying the males and this strengthened my belief for I doubted that such a large party would be Variegated Fairy-wrens.

The birds disappeared into the scrub and I was not able to locate them again, either at that site or various other localities in Maylands, though I searched for several months. Then on 1 July 1984 I saw a male and a female, again near the stream. They only uttered the muted calls typical of all fairy-wrens but I was able to view them in full mid-day sunlight. The breast of the male was an intense bluish-black with a thin jet-black border; his lower back was bluish-purple and without any trace of white. This description subsequently caused me much confusion because it was at variance with my field guides. However Ron Johnstone of the W.A. Museum assured me that the breast of the Variegated Fairy-wren does look like that in good sunlight. Hence it is probable that all the birds seen at this locality were Variegated Fairy-wrens and the species would appear to be a winter visitor to Maylands (Stranger 1993).

On 31 March 1985 I observed a female-plumaged fairy-wren in Lantana thicket to the west of Bardon Park, the locality being 1.25 kilometres from the territories of the White-winged Fairy-wren, *Malurus leuconotus*, which then occurred on the northern mudflat at Maylands (Stranger 1991). And on the 14 April 1985 I heard a fairy-wren call not far from the

original locality, the perennial stream. This new locality is some 0.6 km distant from the range of the White-winged Fairy-wren. If these two observations were also of the Variegated Fairy-wren then autumn can be included in the time that it visits here.

Tom Delaney has twice observed the Variegated Fairy-wren in the riverside vegetation at West Belmont, that locality being two kilometres from the Maylands site, the perennial stream.

REFERENCES

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